## CAMDEN DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN

# Community Meeting #1 January 26, 2012

The community meeting was convened at 6:30 pm on January 26 in the third floor meeting room of the Camden Opera House with nearly eighty citizens attending. Town Manager Pat Finnigan welcomed the group saying the meeting this evening was called so the planners could hear from Townspeople what is they like about the Downtown, and what needs some work. This Master Plan is a blueprint for the future of Camden's downtown, and its success depends on the active participation of residents throughout the process.

## PART 1: INFORMATION: LAYING THE FOUNDATION

## • BACKGROUND (What, Why, Where, Who, and When)

Camden's Development Director, Brian Hodges provided historical background on the development of the Downtown Master Plan concept; introduced the participants and consulting team<sup>i</sup>; outlined the goal of the Plan - to ensure the vibrancy of the downtown is built upon and continues by identifying opportunities for improvements and addressing challenges; and, noted that just having the Plan in place will open up more opportunities for economic development grants.

Referring to a map included in the evening's Power Point presentation<sup>ii</sup>, Mr. Hodges outlined the coverage area designed to incorporate Camden's Tax Increment Financing District. This project began when his advisory committee CEDAC, The Community and Economic Development Committee, relying on guidance from the Camden Comprehensive Plan, developed their vision of a dynamic downtown that would foster development and the creation of new jobs. The Town contracted with the Lachman Group to develop a Master Plan to guide that development.

## APPROACH AND WORK PLAN

Denis Lachman followed to introduce the Plan development process, and discussed the importance of this evening's meeting to the creation of the final Master Plan. This is the first of two Public Forums, and members of the Working Group, including members of the Lachman Team, are here to briefly outline the concept for the Plan, answer any questions, but most importantly, to listen to Townspeople's concerns. They will make appropriate changes to their proposal and come to the second forum in late March to ask if the revised concept shows that they understood participants concerns. The goal is to create a Master Plan that meets the needs and wants of the Town, and this evening's citizen participation will make that possible.

## ❖ THE TEAM – WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

This Team can take the Plan all the way through from Master Planning, Funding (leverage public grants, private investments, tax credits and energy grants), Financial

Modeling and Projects (design, construction and implementation). Working on the three "legs" of the Master Plan are:

Buildings: Denis Lachman, Architect, with Megan Cullen, Architectural Preservation

Consultant

Economics: Rodney Lynch, Planner

Streetscape: Regina Leonard, Landscape Architect, with Mike Sabatini, Engineer

Mr. Lachman showed examples of the kind of work the Team has done in the region to illustrate some component projects – Signage and Wayfinding, and Signage, Parks and Trails – that might be incorporated here.

- Since the Kick-off Meeting in November the Team has been gathering the background information they needed to begin the development of the Plan concept. This second meeting with the Team is to review their findings and get the Working Group's feedback.
- ❖ This is the first of Public Forum and the purpose is to introduce the project to the Town, relay the information the Team has gathered and ask the townspeople "What Do You Think?" What concerns do you have about downtown Camden, and what hopes do you have for the future.
- ❖ In early February, the Team will discuss revisions to the Plan that will be made based on the comments gathered tonight, as well as additional information still to be gathered by the Team. That revised Plan will then be presented at a second Public Forum where townspeople will be asked: "Did We Hear You?" Those comments will be presented to, and discussed with, the Working Group and incorporated into the final Plan. This will be presented to the Select Board for approval by the end of March.

### PART 2: LARGE GROUP FEEDBACK

Attendees were asked to answer the question: What are Your Top Concerns and Top Hopes?

Leonard Lookner: Business Owner: Mr. Lookner asks the Team not to employ solutions used in other Towns that resulted in the loss of character. It would be a mistake to think that traditional planning solutions will work in Camden. He doesn't think we need traditional solutions to parking like a parking garage, for example; there are other solutions that will fit into and maintain the character of the Town.

Jane LaFleur: Friends of Mid-Coast Maine/Downtown resident: Camden still has many residential neighborhoods close to the Downtown, but more and more they are becoming seasonal neighborhoods. If the Downtown is to remain vital, the tide needs to be turned back to year-round residences; she hopes this will be addressed. In addition, the Town needs to look at how to invite their young adults into the business sector of the community so they don't go elsewhere.

Don White: Select Board:

Signage: Directional signage and information signage is not friendly or effective. Night time: This is not a friendly place to shop or walk at night; more and better lighting would be one solution, but there needs to be something to do as well. Pedestrians: The Town needs to be more pedestrian friendly and make it easier and safer to get around.

The Public Landing should have less vehicle traffic and be more pedestrian friendly. The Town needs a parking garage – the Town's Mechanic Street lots would be a good location.

Michael Nash, Property owner/developer: Mr. Nash is one of the owners of the Knox Mill properties and he is concerned about the concept designs that show a pedestrian pathway – a River Walk – coming through the Mill property across private properties.

The concern: There needs to be recognition of what is public property v. what is private property in the conceptual stage of this proposal.

Bob Gassett, Camden Conservation Commission: The Town needs a place to host forums for residents to discuss and resolve issues before they become contentious. Previous economic development proposals have resulted in fracturing the community; discussions need to be held early on in the process if projects are going to move forward.

Nancy Caudle-Johnson: There needs to be something more to do at night all seasons of the year – more than just going to restaurants. There needs to be more walk-ability around Town – lots of activity on the streets year-round. Camden needs to develop a unique identity; the energy that is evident in Belfast and Rockland is needed here. There is no unified purpose in Town anymore, and it is important that we find where we want to go and how we want to get there together.

Anita Brosius-Scott, Resident: Townspeople value the character of Camden and have worked hard to retain it. A sense of pedestrian energy is needed: encourage outdoor seating; encourage activities Downtown that will bring energy and activity; and make art a large part of the streetscape – on the sidewalks and in the parks. It is important to preserve ground floor space for retail use.

Richard Anderson, Business Owner: Bring jobs and workers and everything everyone is asking for will come with the resulting prosperity; jobs are the beginning and the basis for all things to happen.

Hamilton Hall, Resident: There is a need to stop, and to prevent, the residential conversion of commercial spaces, and to preserve them for the future as commercial uses.

#### **PART 3: INFORMATION**

The timeline for the Work Plan shows the following: The Buildings component has compiled an inventory and asked for feedback – including that received at this meeting; the Economics interviews and analysis of data has begun with recommendations prepared for feedback this month and next; and the Streetscape engineering and assessment of infrastructure is completed, and the Concept Design prepared for feedback that will be used to further develop the Concept for more feedback in February. All the information will be synthesized for the Final Report due at the end of March. Meetings have been taking place with the Working Group, the Downtown Business Group, CEDAC, and the Chamber since November, and more meeting are scheduled in February and March with plenty of opportunities for comment.

### • **BUILDINGS**: Denis Lachman:

Mr. Lachman provided an example of the eventual Building Inventory he will produce when all the data has been collected. Mr. Lachman will build on information gathered for CEDAC's *Economic Development Analysis & Action Plan* last January – that is where some of the data in the example come from, as well as the Town's 2010 Downtown TIF District.

He will provide information for each commercial property in the project area with regard to: Total Net of Leasable square footage; 1<sup>st</sup> Floor square footage; 1<sup>st</sup> Floor current Use and Comments; 1<sup>st</sup> Floor – Number of employees; and job types. There will be additional information provided in the inventory as well, including the ownership and specific location information as well as photos of 168 properties. But, the data regarding the space available for use are the most important components of the building inventory; once they know what businesses are here now, what businesses people want in Town, and what spaces are available for those uses, the Town will be able to target specific businesses to attract them to Town.

## • **ECONOMICS**: Rodney Lynch:

Mr. Lynch also relied on information in CEDAC's *Economic Development Analysis & Action Plan* which contained a good inventory of current businesses. He has conducted one-on-one interviews with Downtown businesses, merchants, business groups, property owners, Town committees and the Chamber to identify economic development issues facing the Downtown.

He found the following themes:

### \*Concept of Greater Downtown that is more than just Main and Elm Streets

- "Camden as a Campus" brings outlying areas into use
- Parking: Finding available off-Main Street parking and the need for a parking garage
- Improved signage to get people off Main and Elm Streets to side streets
- Integrating the Knox Mill area into the Downtown
- Integration of the Megunticook River into the Downtown the River Walk is a popular concept.

#### \* Economic Trends

- Camden should be developing its own direction different from other communities
- Primarily tourist and service economy with a need to grow the sector of other supporting businesses
- The emphasis should remain on attracting small businesses
- Camden can become a center for Maine and regionally produced products and goods
- The "Brain immigration" of talented older and retirees moving to Midcoast should be marketed to attract more of the same
- The Town's Quality of Life should be the focus of marketing to businesses

## \* Economic Challenges

- How to attract more people to Downtown and to the area both visitors and residents: parking is seen as a problem and that needs to be overcome before residents will come back to Downtown to do business.
- Older buildings with high maintenance costs
- Rents and competition with lower rents in other communities
- A lack of office space wired with modern technology
- There is a need to attract more younger people to visit the area younger people want more night time activities than there are now.

## **Questions:**

Jane LaFleur asked if Downtown residences where there were Home Occupations were included in the inventory of businesses. Mr. Lynch replied that the data was collected only for the study area.

Leonard Lookner noted that he had not been contacted for an interview, and another business owner in the audience said the same. Mr. Lachman suggested that any business owner who wants can give their name to Mr. Lynch following the meeting if they want to be interviewed for the project.

## • **STREETSCAPE**: Regina Leonard:

- ❖ General Project Approach: 1<sup>st</sup>: Research, review and understand the Town's resources and needs; 2<sup>nd</sup>: Inventory and assess infrastructure including sidewalks, streetscape, circulation patterns, pedestrian safety and public spaces; 3<sup>rd</sup>: Create goals and objects for improvements understanding the constraints and defining possibilities.
- \* Guiding Principles and Goals (as suggested, in part, by the CEDAC Economic Development Analysis & Action Plan): 1) Leverage Camden's "Quality of Life" to attract and retain workforce by preserving, enhancing and creating recreational and natural resource-based opportunities; 2) Maintain and preserve the community balance and sense of place. Develop a River Walk along the Megunticook River to move visitors off Main Street; maintain the harbor as a high-end tourism attraction; expand and enhance pedestrian and sidewalk spaces while calming traffic; and improve neighborhood interconnectivity with a series of trails and bikeways; and 3)

Enhance the quality of life by providing more opportunities for recreation by implementing the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan of 2007.

- \* Purpose of the Plan: Create a vital and vibrant year-round downtown by improving way-finding for car and foot traffic; enhancing streetscapes and infrastructure; and capitalizing on the historic downtown.
- \* Inventory & Assessment: Major Issues & Considerations:
  - Parking –Make parking spaces easier to find with improved signage;
  - Traffic Calm traffic, promote side street activity; Signage – improve directional and information signage;
  - Best Use of Town Properties consider Chamber building, Town Office, Public Landing and on-street parking spaces;
  - Pedestrians Improve walkability with safe crossings and routes, connectivity, and by creating a pedestrian environment.

### **CONCEPT DIAGRAM – STRATEGY:**

Ms. Leonard noted that the design is very conceptual at this point in time and is meant to be a starting place for conversations. They started with the overriding goal of leveraging Camden's Quality of Place in recommending changes and improvements. There were several issues they were to address:

- **THE CONCEPTUAL PLAN:** Parking: Make it easier to find.
- Traffic: Calm Route 1 traffic by promoting side street activity
- Signage: Improve wayfinding with signage and improve business signage
- Town properties: Consider the highest and best use
- Pedestrian: Improve walkability with safe crossing and the creation of pedestrian routes
- Create three central points with proposed improvements at each:
  - A North Gateway into Downtown (Route 52 and 1 intersection): Improve the arrival zone and pedestrian accommodations; clarify vehicular routes, and add/improve signage.
  - A South Gateway at the Stop-and-Go: Improve arrival zone and pedestrian accommodations, clarify vehicular routes, and add/improve signage.
  - A Downtown Center Hub the five-way intersection at French & Brawn: Reconfigure the intersection(s) starting with Mechanic Street, clarify vehicular circulation, accommodate pedestrians, improve signage, and add streetscape amenities.
- \* Create a River Walk and Harbor Walk to facilitate a pedestrian circulation route to:
  - Capitalize on Camden's natural scenic, historic and recreational resources
  - ▶ Enhance Downtown links
  - Provide links to Downtown parks and opens spaces
- Enhance links to recreational and regional destinations (Snow Bowl, Tannery, State Park and Pathways)

- Enhance links to public parking lots:
  - Update pedestrian routes and streetscape amenities
  - Incorporate directional signage along specified routes
  - Investigate shared use parking opportunities

#### Comments:

#### River Walk:

Michael Nash: He tendered an invitation to Ms. Leonard to visit the site and discuss the River Walk proposal where it crosses his properties at the Knox Mill. A comment was made from the audience that the River Walk that Ms. Leonard refers to having been under discussion by the Town for years applies to the Tannery Site only – the Town decided a long time ago to shelve the idea of a walkway along the river. Ms. Leonard replied that the Conceptual Plan, where it shows a River Walk circulation pattern, is meant to suggest only a pattern of movement and not a specific location. It is important that a connection be made to integrate that area of Town into the Downtown and the Harbor by way of interconnected walking routes. Mr. Lachman noted that there is already a north-south pattern of traffic through Town on Route 1 – they are looking for an opportunity to create a way to connect the Town moving east and west, and doing this by foot is the only practical solution.

Trolleys/Shuttles: Someone asked if the Team had look at this as an option to move people from parking area to parking area. Ms. Leonard replied that they have just started that conversation.

### PART 4: SMALL GROUP FEEDBACK

The attendees were asked to break into nine groups to discuss their most pressing concerns, as well as their highest hopes for the future of Camden. These are the results, reported back to the meeting from the break-out groups, and arranged here in alphabetical order. This listing is not an indication of the priority of importance these issues were assigned by the participants, but many of the hopes, as well as many of the concerns, were reported as shared by many of the group. (NOTE: This listing incorporates the listing from Part 2: Large Group Feedback on page 2.)

#### **TOP HOPES:**

#1: QUALITY OF LIFE: Maintain Camden's unique quality of life, which draws businesses and residents to the area, while making this a better place to live and work.

Activity: Create high-visibility activities downtown year-round

Bring more activities to Town: Think of closing an area to vehicular traffic one day a week to create an area for the Farmers Market to be right Downtown.

Create a Historical Museum.

Create an Arts Commission to bring more art and art events to Town; they are popular now and the Town should do more events like sidewalk art shows.

Embrace recreational themes: Take advantage of the Snow Bowl, State Park, Pathways, and create outdoor activities year-round.

Utilize the "campus concept" for multi-layered activities and events. Think of shutting off side streets to host certain events downtown.

Create more outdoor events year round like the Winter Festival and Christmas by the Sea. We need a sense of pedestrian energy – visible activity – on the streets and sidewalks to attract visitors to stop and to attract locals downtown.

Work to "keep the lights on" after conferences have ended with follow-up activities and events making visitors extend their stay.

College Campus: Establish a Community College.

## Green Energy:

Use a bio-fueled trolley to shuttle people around town including to and from outlying parking areas.

Create opportunities to develop hydro-power at the Megunticook River Dams to attract green industries and businesses.

#### Locals:

Establish businesses locals want and need downtown – a moderately priced clothing store and other useful stores – to bring locals back downtown to the shops year-round. Bring a retail mix back to Town.

Involve locals and engage them in these decisions: work especially to reach those with dissenting opinions so they can be heard.

Work to maintain a sense of community and find shared goals; motivate others to join in efforts.

Find those with common interests and form coalitions to work toward common goals. Make the downtown very livable and walk able for downtown residents; encourage people to live downtown; reduce traffic and walk everywhere. Provide the services people need within walking distance. Rents need to be reasonable for residents as well as for businesses.

Need a place to hold forums to discuss issues – divisive and otherwise – to work problems out before they escalate.

Locals need to collaborate on making decisions, but when a decision has been made the Town needs to embrace the wishes of the majority and not continue the fight.

Movie Theatre: Mentioned several times as the example of the kind of night time activities people want to see. There was a suggestion to reactive the Movie Theatre Group.

Parking: Parking garage with new and modern office spaces on ground floor.

Better signage to parking areas. Two hour parking limits in some areas isn't business friendly (schooner rides take longer than allowed parking).

### Pedestrians:

Create pedestrian traffic with new pathways, a River Walk, a Harbor Walk - interconnected and leading to various parts of Town, as well as linking to outlying areas like the Snow Bowl, the State Park and the Tannery as well.

Get people out walking on the streets – including locals.

There is a lot of pavement at the intersection of Mechanic and Main – do we need it all or is this an opportunity to create a welcoming, pedestrian oriented central space – a hub.

Public Landing: Make the landing a gathering place for people instead of parking.

#### Streets and sidewalks:

Bring activity and life to the streets, sidewalks and parks: More outdoor seating opportunities (benches); outdoor café tables; art at intersections as part of streetscape and in the park.

Technology-based information systems (GPS, Google Maps, Phone Apps):

This could be used to provide information to supplement signage to show where parking is located in Town among other things.

The Town could develop a Downtown Merchants App

The Town should bring Broad Band – free Wi-Fi – to Town for locals and visitors alike.

Encourage more technology-based conferences and events to come to Town.

Encourage technology-based businesses to come to Town by providing state-of-the-art office space.

Tourism Bureau: Instead of the Chamber, have an office just for tourism providing information and directions – not just to Chamber members but to everyone.

#### **TOP CONCERNS**

#1: JOBS! JOBS! JOBS! The downtown needs to be vital year round, the town needs to be vital year round, and we need good, well-paying, year-round jobs – lots of them.

## Economic Development/Business atmosphere:

Many businesses have closed in the last six months of 2011: how many and why? This information needs to be gathered and assessed.

Create a business incubator.

Marry the friendly atmosphere of Camden with responsible business development.

Work hard to find a way to help Camden's businesses compete with other tourist destinations.

Camden's Ordinances restrict business development.

The current Select Board is more business friendly – make changes.

Concerns are sometimes created instead of evolving naturally – resist changes made just to change.

The Downtown Plan should focus on what happens here in winter to bring about year-round development; businesses do OK in the summer – we need to work first on becoming a year-round Town.

Camden needs to define a brand – a unique identity – in order to remain competitive.

Take advantage of all the other studies that have already been done instead of doing that work all over again.

## Character of the Town:

Don't throw the baby out with the bath water in trying to "improve" the Town: Avoid mistakes made by other towns trying to improve traffic or pedestrian safety and losing what is unique – don't use traditional solutions but find solutions that fit this Town; Maintain the look of the Downtown as it is now; Changes should evolve not be created "evolution not revolution":

We can't do "nothing" and resist change; we must find what we can do to create business year-round and keep the character of the Town and then do it.

Market the Historic character of the Downtown specifically; the B&B's in particular are in historic buildings – this is a valuable asset that should be stressed.

We are a small Town with a limited Downtown area; recognize our physical limitations and don't overdevelop.

## Dark Houses and Dark Neighborhoods:

Many close in neighborhoods are summer only residences now and many are rented most of the season; this takes business away from B&B's and owners don't contribute to the Town as participating residents, don't own businesses or support them year round. They are not functioning households and the trend is harmful to the Town.

#### Jobs:

Create incentives to encourage small start-up businesses to set up here.

Work to fill need for year-round good jobs downtown.

Provide good office spaces with parking.

Good jobs won't come without amenities – which comes first? Provide the amenities and employers will come; or, create jobs and the amenities will follow. What can the Town do?

Jobs continue to be lost downtown: Work to attract businesses with good jobs; work to attract year-round small businesses.

Work to retain our young people and to attract young families.

Create shared office-space concept for small businesses.

Lighting: This is not a friendly Town at night; we need better lighting as well as places to shop or walk.

Very poor pedestrian lighting: it is hard for pedestrians to see where they are walking and harder still for drivers to see pedestrians.

Night time activities: Movies, movies, movies – everyone want the theatre back. There is nothing to do at night for visitors and locals alike. Young people won't come to stay if there is nothing for them to do. Visitors to B&B's are always asking what they can do.

Parking: Existing parking should be better used. Educate employees and employers about the need to free up parking on downtown streets.

Provide parking on outer Union Street with bike rentals to get around Town.

We need a parking garage – preferably on Town property at Mechanic Street.

Pedestrians: Improve Mechanic Street and Bayview Street intersections for pedestrians.

Create an actual physical walkway to move pedestrians off Main Street and around various parts of Town.

The Town needs to be more pedestrian friendly day and night.

There needs to be recognition of public v. private property when developing pedestrian walk ways.

The pedestrian pathways should evolve instead of being created suddenly; they can be planned but perhaps not implemented all at once.

Rents: Camden is losing businesses to Rockland and Belfast due to highest rents around. What can be done to help bring them into line? Young people from Town want to stay and start their businesses here but just cannot afford the rents.

Schools: Keep the elementary and middle schools in Town.

Signs: A major concern is improving signage both to improve traffic flow and help people find their way around Town. In addition to several comments along these lines people added: No billboards! All signage should be in good taste. Monitor the size of signs.

Work on directional signage first.

Work on directional signage first.

There is an over-emphasis on the need for parking and signs to parking.

Use visual clues instead of signs – or in addition to signs – to help direct people. There are things that can be done with streetscapes to get people to turn corners instead of more signs – Rockland has done well with this with planters, benches, etc.

Tourism: Don't accept that Camden can *only* be a tourist town.

Town Property: Chamber-of-Commerce: The office should be relocated to one of the Gateways, or at the entrance to Town, to make the services more accessible and free up valuable space on the Public Landing.

The Public Landing is underutilized: take advantage of this spectacular space. This would be a good night-time destination for people walking if there were lighting and some café tables – a gathering place.

Town Office: Find the highest and best use for the building, relocate the Town Office and return the building to retail like it always was.

Utilize the entire Opera House including redoing the third floor; the concept under discussion is exciting.

Traffic: Congestion caused by double-parked delivery trucks on Route 1.

Don't muck up the intersection at French and Brawn.

Fix the intersections at the Gateways to make them more welcoming, safer and easier to travel through: The Stop sign at Stop-and-Go is not very welcoming.

Make traffic flow better by working on pedestrian crossings so everything flows better.

Be creative in finding an interactive solution to the traffic/pedestrian situation at the bottlenecks.

Young People: There are no activities for young people here.

Make the Town child-friendly with activities geared toward children and families.

Zoning: Establish consistent zoning for downtown permitting retail on the first floor. Save ground floor space for retail and not for residential.

### PART 5: NEXT STEPS & WRAP UP

Mr. Hodges announced that the next Public Forum will be held on March 14 with the location to be announced. In between now and then a survey will be circulated, and he would appreciate everyone being on the look-out for the announcement that it is ready so the word can get out to as many residents as possible. There are no plans to mail the survey to everyone in Town, but he will do his best to make sure that there is coverage in the press so interested folks know where they can get a copy. He will also announce the survey on the Town website and have it available for downloading there.

A listing of the Hopes and Concerns gathered this evening, as well as information on the proposal, will also be available on the site. He is going to offer a place for comments, and anyone can add to the listing of concerns by sending him an email directly off from the website.

There was concern expressed that not enough notice was given for this evening's meeting, and a request to reach out to more people so more Townspeople can be involved at this stage of the process.

Mr. Hodges closed by saying that he has received commitments from the Town Manager, CEDAC, Downtown Business Group, and Chamber of Commerce – and he makes the same promise – that this Master Plan will not "sit on the shelf". It will be incorporated into the work plans of these groups.

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Jeanne Hollingsworth, Recording Secretary

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>i</sup> The names, affiliations, and email addresses of the Downtown Plan Working Group are included as an attachment here.

ii The Power Point presentation will be made available on the Town of Camden's website at: <a href="http://www.camdenmaine.gov">http://www.camdenmaine.gov</a>: Town Departments; Community and Economic Development; Downtown Master Plan; Activity to Date; Community Meeting #1.

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